

**CLAIMS**

What is claimed is:

1. A method for securely distributing a component from a network host to a  
5 network appliance, comprising the steps of:  
    signing, by said network host, a configuration file including a load table  
    which defines a plurality of authorized components for said network appliance;  
    executing a secure kernel and said signed configuration file on said  
network appliance, said secure kernel including computer code for checking the  
10 authenticity of said configuration file;  
    verifying, by said secure kernel, the authenticity of said configuration  
file;  
    reading, by said secure kernel, said load table only after said verifying  
step; and  
15 loading said plurality of authorized components onto said network  
appliance.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein said loading step comprises loading an  
operating system.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein said loading step comprises loading a  
20 computer software application.
4. The method of claim 1, wherein said loading step comprises loading  
services.
5. The method of claim 1, further comprising the steps of:  
    generating, by said host, an updated configuration file;  
25 signing, by said host, said updated configuration file;  
    transmitting said signed updated configuration file from said host to said  
network appliance;  
    verifying, by said secure kernel, the authenticity of said updated  
configuration file; and  
30 thereafter reading, by said secure kernel, said updated configuration file.